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ABSTRACT

Arguing that a powerful teaching technique teachers can use for developing students' comprehension strategies is direct instruction in the thinking strategies used for various comprehension tasks, this paper: presents characteristics of 25 tradebooks appropriate for the application of various comprehension strategies; gives specific examples of titles to be used to practice and apply various comprehension strategies; provides brief annotations of books mentioned; and suggests activities and discussion questions for some of the titles. (RS)

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Applying Comprehension Strategies to K-3 Tradebooks

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Applying Comprehension Strategies to K-3 Tradebooks

Introduction

One powerful teaching technique teachers can use for developing comprehension strategies is direct instruction in the thinking strategies used for various comprehension tasks (Duffy, Roehler, Sivan, Rackliffe, Book, Meloth, Varvus, Wesselman, Putnam, & Bassiri, 1987). After providing direct instruction, teachers should help children practice and apply the strategies taught. Practice and application associated with reading (or hearing) and discussing tradebooks will result in better learning and transfer than will practice and application to worksheets (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

This paper will present characteristics of tradebooks appropriate for the application of various comprehension strategies, give specific examples of titles to be used to practice and apply various comprehension strategies, provide brief annotations of books mentioned, and suggest activities and/ or discussion questions for some of the titles. After using the titles and questions/activities suggested to help children practice and apply comprehension strategies, readers are encouraged to look to their own classroom and school libraries for additional titles that could be used for practice and application of the comprehension strategies they are teaching.

Making Predictions

Select books for which students can use their own background of experiences and knowledge, as well as what has happened so far in the book, to predict what a character will do or what will happen. See Heald-Taylor (1987) and Routman (1988) for lists of predictable books. For comprehension practice and application, choose from these lists books in which the action or events are predictable rather than those in which only the rhyme patterns or words are predictable. When comparing their predictions to what the author wrote, emphasize the idea that a prediction is good if it's reasonable; it doesn't have to be what the author wrote.

Sample Titles

The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf, Viking Press, 1937 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

Ferdinand is a gentle bull who wants to spend his life smelling the flowers in his meadow. "Scouts" for the bullring select him because they think he's fierce after they witness his response to sitting on a bee.

Most young students will not have experiences with bullfights, but they will have

experiences with insect stings. Before reading, give students some background information on bullfights - perhaps as a part of a unit of study on Spain or Mexico - and discuss their experiences with being stung by an insect.

During reading, stop at appropriate points to discuss the following questions:

What words could you use to describe Ferdinand - how he looks, thinks, and acts?

What does Ferdinand want to do with his life?

What are the men looking for?

Do you think they'll pick Ferdinand? Why or why not?

What would you do if you sat on a bee? What do you think Ferdinand will do?

What words could you use to describe how Ferdinand acted when he sat on the bee?

Now do you think the men will pick Ferdinand? Why or why not?

How will the story end: What will Ferdinand do in the bullring? How will he get home to his meadow to spend his life as he wants, smelling the flowers?

Make a prediction map (Heimlich & Pittelman, 1986) to record student predictions about the end; read to the end of the book; discuss and compare student suggestions to author's ending.

Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present by Charlotte Zolotow, Harper & Row, 1962 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

Most students will have experience with wanting to give a mother, or someone else they love, just the right present for a birthday or other occasion. Before reading discuss giving loved ones presents with students. When? How do we select the right present? What can we do if we don't have a lot of money to spend? Read the first two episodes to establish the book's pattern. From then on, stop to discuss the following questions as the color for each episode is introduced:

What does your mother, or someone else you love, like that is (color)?

What in nature is (color)? Will the rabbit suggest that? If he does, what will the little girl say?

What jewel is (color)? Will the rabbit suggest that? If he does, what will the little girl say?

What fruit might the rabbit suggest? Why?

What will the little girl give her mother?

This book is a great selection for sharing as a prop story. As each fruit is mentioned, put some on a table. At the end, pull out a basket and put the fruit in it. Then cut and enjoy a fruit salad.

Comparing and Contrasting

Select books with similar plots; books in which characters have similar adventures or problems.

Sample Titles

Benjamin Budge and Barnaby Ball by Florence Parry Heide, Scholastic, 1967 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

After reading this book, in which one man is too big for everything in his life and the other too small, help children compare and contrast the men and their problems by guiding them to create a visual (e.g., graphic organizer, Piccolo, 1987; structured notes, Smith & Tompkins, 1988; a modification of simplified idea maps, Davidson, 1982; or a modification of paragraph frames, Cudd & Roberts, 1989) on a chart, the chalkboard, or an overhead transparency.

Where and Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak, Harper and Row, 1963 (Paperback edition from Scholastic) **AND** *In the Forest* by Marie Hall Ets, Viking Press, 1944 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

All students will have experience with daydreaming, having fantasies, being bored, and being angry. In both books the main action occurs in the character's dream. In the first, the bored little boy has a daydream about pleasant adventures with gentle (real) animals in a forest. In the second, angry Max has a nightdream in which fantasizes that he leads fierce (unreal) animals on a wild rumpus in the jungle.

As, or after, each book is read, record answers to the following questions:

Throughout most of the book, what was Max/the little boy doing?

Why?

What happened in his dream?

Were was he in the dream?

What were the animals like?

When and why did he stop dreaming?

After both books have been enjoyed and discussed, go back to the questions and previously recorded answers to discuss how the stories were alike and different. You might illustrate the likenesses and differences with a visual as discussed above.

The Man Who Didn't Wash His Dishes by Phyllis Krasilovsky, Doubleday, 1950 (Paperback edition from Scholastic) **AND** *The Plant Sitter* by Gene Zion, Harper & Row, 1959 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

In both books homes become so full of something that life for the occupants is miserable.

In the former the problem occurs because a man is not doing his housework; in the latter because a boy has a job.

Mr. Gumpy's Outing by John Burningham, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970 (Paperback editions from Puffin and Scholastic) **AND** *Red Fox and His Canoe* by Nathaniel Benchley, Harper & Row, 1964 (Paperback edition from Scholastic) **AND** *One Frog Too Many* by Mercer & Marianna Mayer, Dial, 1975 (Paperback edition from Dial's Pied Piper).

In each these books a boatowner's kindness in taking all comers for a boatride ends in everyone getting wet. The boatowners' responses and actions after the dunkings differ.

Millions of Cats by Wanda Gag, Coward McCann, 1928 (Paperback edition from Scholastic) **AND** *Kittens and More Kittens* by Marci Ridlon, Follett, 1967 (Paperback edition from Young Readers Press).

In both of these books someone wants a cat and ends up with cats, too many cats. How they solve their problem and end up with what they wanted, a cat, differs.

The Little House by Virginia Lee Burton, Houghton Mifflin, 1942 (Paperback edition from Houghton Mifflin's Sandpiper Books) **AND** *The Little Chestnut Tree Story* by Lisl Weil, Scholastic, 1973.

Both the house and the tree begin in the countryside. Cities grow up around them, and they do not prosper. Seasonal activities are discussed in both books. In the end, both the house and the tree are transported back to the countryside.

Under a Mushroom by Anita Lobel, Harper & Row, 1970 (Paperback edition from Scholastic) **AND** *Everything Under a Mushroom* by Ruth Krauss, Scholastic, 1973.

In the first book folks gather under a mushroom to escape a shower and end up living there. In the second children gather under a mushroom to play, have a party, and are shielded from a shower.

Making Inferences and Drawing Conclusions

Choose books with vivid details the children can put together with their own experiential backgrounds or knowledge to make inferences or draw conclusions. Ask questions before the answers are revealed in the stories, or at the end if the answers are not revealed in the stories. When children suggest answers, have them explain how they determined their answers. What details or clues from the book and what information form their own experiences did they use?

Sample Titles

The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats, Viking, 1962 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

Peter enjoys a day in the snow. He puts a snowball in his pocket to save before he goes into his warm house. Before he goes to bed he finds the snowball is gone.

What happened to Peter's snowball?

Little Raccoon and the Thing in the Pool by Lilian Moore, McGraw Hill, 1963 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

Brave Little Raccoon wants to bring home the supper. But, to do so he has to cross the pool on the log bridge. Everytime he tries to cross, he looks in the water and a scarey thing looks back. When he threatens it, it threatens him back. His mother finally tells him what it is. The author doesn't tell the reader. But, you can ask the children:

What is the thing in the pool?

Miss Nelson in Missing by James Marshall, Houghton Mifflin, 1977 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

Miss Nelson is a kind teacher with a misbehaving class. She disappears and is replaced by cruel Miss Swamp. When she returns her class is lovely. But who was Miss Swamp? No one knows, but your class can figure it out by looking in Miss Nelson's closet.

Who was Miss Swamp?

No Roses for Harry by Gene Zion, Harper and Row, 1958 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

Grandma sends Harry a sweater he hates for his birthday. Harry finally gets rid of it by letting a bird use it to build a nest. Then Grandma decides to visit and Harry must find a way to show her that her present is being used.

Why do you think Harry's frantic to get the family to walk him in the park once Grandma arrives for her visit?

The Story about Ping by Marjorie Flack, Viking, 1933 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

Ping lives on a boat in China. Every night the last duck aboard gets a swat. One day when Ping knows he will be last he stays on land. The result is he almost ends up as dinner. In the end he is glad to board his boat last, even though he'll get a swat.

At the end Ping boards the boat last, even though he knows he'll get a swat. Why do you think he did this?

Cause and Effect

Choose books for which the children can use their own knowledge and experiences to make the connections between causes and effects.

Sample Titles

The Story about Ping by Marjorie Flack, Viking, 1933.

Why did Ping decide to stay on land?

Why was Ping happy to board the boat at the end, even though he'd be last and get a swat?

The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats, Viking, 1962.

Why did the snowball melt?

Miss Nelson in Missing by James Marshall, Houghton Mifflin, 1977.

Why did Miss Nelson trick her class?

Why did the class work so hard to try to find Miss Nelson?

Why did the class behave so well when Miss Nelson returned?

Distinguishing Between Fictional and Factual Text/Narrative and Expository Text

Choose a narrative and an exposition on the same topic and read them in the same day or within a day or so of each other. Conduct your normal discussion after reading each. After both are read, review the characteristics of fact and fiction. Then discuss the two books in terms of those characteristics and classify each as fact or fiction. Completing story frames (Cudd & Roberts, 1987; Fowler, 1982) for the narratives and paragraph frames (Cudd & Roberts, 1989) would be another way to help children distinguish between the two types of texts.

Sample Titles

Frog and Toad Are Friends by Arnold Lobel, Harper & Row, 1970 (Paperback edition from Scholastic) **AND** *I Can Read About Frogs and Toads* by Ellen Schultz, Troll, 1979.

The first book is one of a series of books containing stories about the adventures of a fictional frog and toad who are friends. The second presents information about the lifecycles and characteristics of frogs and toads.

The Bears Who Went to the Seaside by Susanna Gretz, Ernest Benn, 1972 (Paperback edition from Scholastic) **AND** *Down to the Beach* by May Garelick, Four Winds, 1973 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

The first book deals with the adventures of a group of bears, and their dog, who camp at the beach for a couple of days. The second presents information about characteristics of beaches, animals native to beaches, and things people do at beaches.

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble by William Steig, Simon and Schuster, 1963 (Paperback edition from Scholastic) **AND** *A Book of Seasons* by Alice and Martin Provensen, Random House, 1976 (Paperback edition from Random's Pictureback; Spanish translation by Pilar de Cuenca & Inez Alvarez, 1982).

The first book weaves information about the seasons into the story of Sylvester's sad exile as a rock to illustrate that he is lost for a year. In the second, factual information about the seasons and human activities during each is presented.

The Carrot Seed by Ruth Kraus, Scholastic, 1964 **AND** *A Seed is a Promise* by Claire Merrill, Scholastic, 1973.

In the first book information about the how a seed becomes a plant are presented within the context of a little boy's efforts to grow a carrot. In the second, factual information about what seeds are, how they are transported, and how they become plants is presented.

The Little House by Virginia Lee Burton, Houghton Mifflin, 1942 or *The Little Chestnut Tree Story* by Lisl Weil, Scholastic, 1973 could also be used with *Seasons* by Alice and Martin Provensen, Random House, 1976.

Making Generalizations

Generalizations are rules made based on evidence presented. Fables, traditional and modern, are excellent vehicles for application to narratives after instruction in making generalizations. The moral of a fable is a generalization. Read the fable, but not the moral. The question for all titles suggested is some variation of "What did X learn from this experience; what can we learn from X's experiences; or, what do you think the author wants us to learn from this story?" As with inferences, ask children to explain how they arrived at their answers. As with predictions, make it clear that a good generalization or moral is one that is supported by the events (evidence) in the story; it does not have to be the same moral as that given by the author.

Sample Titles

Fables by Arnold Lobel, Harper and Row, 1980 (Paperback edition from Harper's Trophy Books).

This Caldecott Medal winner is a collection of fables, mostly classics, designed to be read to younger readers.

The Tortise and the Hare adapted by Janet Stevens, Holiday House, 1984 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

In this modern version of the classic fable the tortise wears contemporary running shoes.

That's What Friends are For by Florence Parry Heide and Sylvia Worth Van Clief, Four Winds, 1968 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

This is a modern story in which animals teach a lesson - friends are to help.

A Bargain for Frances by Russell Hoban, Harper and Row, 1970 (Paperback edition from Scholastic).

This modern story may not usually be classified as a fable, but it does have a moral.

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